



Introduction

During the second and third trimesters, you may have painful leg cramps, particularly at night or while sleeping. You may also have jumpy feeling in your legs. Leg cramps tend to occur more often during the last month of pregnancy.

Causes of Leg Cramps During Pregnancy

Leg cramps are a sudden tightening of muscles, which can cause intense pain. The reason for increased leg cramps during pregnancy isn't clear. Experts once thought that most leg cramps were caused by too little calcium in the diet. They no longer believe that this is true. Calcium is important to your baby's development and it helps keep your own bones strong and healthy. The muscles may tighten for a variety of reasons, such as:

- Lack of fluids
- Injury
- Muscle strain
- Staying in the same position for a long period of time
- Blood circulation problems or pressure on the nerves in the spine.
- The stress of your leg muscles due to carrying the extra weight of pregnancy.
- The pressure of the growing baby on the nerves and blood vessels that go to your legs.

Prevention

If you do experience a leg cramp during pregnancy there are some things you can do to relieve them.

1. Stretch
 - a. Stretching your legs (especially your calves) before going to bed can help reduce your chances of getting leg cramps.
 - b. When you feel a cramp in your leg, straighten your leg-heel first and wiggle your toes.
 - c. Avoid pointing your toes when stretching or exercising.
2. Don't stay still
 - a. Avoid standing or sitting in one position for long periods of time.
 - b. Avoid sitting in a position that may restrict blood flow (such as sitting with your legs crossed for long periods of times).
3. Exercise
 - a. With your provider's OK, regular exercise can help prevent leg cramps.
 - b. If you're able to stand, walking for a few minutes when you have a leg cramp can help ease the pain and relax the muscle.
4. Drink plenty of fluids
 - a. Be sure to drink plenty of water during the day to avoid getting dehydrated.
5. Massage your legs and apply heat
 - a. When you have a leg cramp, relax the muscle through gentle massage, or heat the muscle with a warm towel or hot water bottle.
 - b. A warm bath before bedtime may also help to relax your muscles and prevent leg cramps.

When to Talk to Your Healthcare Provider

Leg cramps usually go away on their own without medical treatment. They can be a sign of a more serious problem. Talk to your health care provider right away if:

- The pain is frequent and severe
- You notice any redness, warmth, swelling or tenderness in your legs.